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# Economic and Social Council

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## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

**Fifty-fourth session**

**Summary record (partial)* of the first meeting**

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 23 February 2015, at 10 a.m.

*Temporary Chairperson*: Mr. Walker (Representative of the Secretary-General)
*Chairperson*: Mr. Sadi

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Opening of the session**

1. **The Temporary Chairperson** (Director, Human Rights Treaties Division), on behalf of the Secretary-General, declared open the fifty-fourth session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and welcomed Mr. Chen, Mr. De Schutter and Mr. Uprimny Yepes as new members of the Committee.

2. Reporting on recent events of interest to the Committee, he said that South Africa had become the 163rd State to ratify the Covenant. Eighteen States had already become parties to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant and several others had expressed the intention to do so. The jurisprudence that the Committee would develop through its consideration of individual communications under the Optional Protocol would contribute significantly to clarifying rights and providing further guidance on remedies. The four States parties that had ratified or acceded to the Optional Protocol in 2014 had undoubtedly been encouraged to do so by the activities in their countries of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). That work focused on Africa and Latin America and was continuing. The Office also collaborated closely with the Group of Friends of the Optional Protocol and the International NGO Coalition, both of which were working to promote ratification of the Optional Protocol. Furthermore, it had recently launched a database of jurisprudence (juris.ohchr.org).

3. Unfortunately, the current budget crisis was affecting all parts of the Office, including the Human Rights Treaties Division. In line with General Assembly resolution 68/268, the Office would concentrate on helping each Committee to reach the targets set in terms of lists of issues, concluding observations and communications, but would be less able to assist in other areas, such as the development of general comments. The Secretary-General intended to compile a biennial report on implementation of the resolution, reviewing the efforts made to reduce the backlog in the Office's work and harmonize working methods. The Committee was encouraged to continue considering ways of contributing to those goals, particularly in relation to the consultation process for developing general comments. The General Assembly had also requested treaty body Chairpersons to keep States parties updated on the application of the Addis Ababa Guidelines on the independence and impartiality of members of the human rights treaty bodies, and the Committee might wish to consider how it could do so.

4. In line with resolution 68/268, the treaty bodies would now be allocated a maximum of three languages for their meetings and documents, with exceptional provision for a fourth language when necessary. The limited resources that were available would be used to meet the additional language needs of all 10 treaty bodies and so moderation was called for. While the Division of Conference Services would endeavour to meet such exceptional needs, the Committee would need to inform it in advance of requirements for forthcoming sessions.

5. In September 2015, the General Assembly would adopt the Sustainable Development Goals. The Secretary-General had recently called for a universal human rights-based development agenda and the current draft texts for the Goals included references to economic, social and cultural, as well as civil and political, rights. The treaty body Chairpersons had adopted a joint statement on the post-2015 development agenda, urging Member States to maintain and strengthen the emphasis on human rights and calling for a technical review of the proposed Goals to ensure that they were aligned with the international treaties.

6. A second area that would be of interest in 2015 was the Social Protection Floors Initiative, described by the Secretary-General in a recent report to the Human Rights

Council, which made extensive reference to the Covenant and the work of the Committee. Social protection floors could help to ensure the enjoyment of minimum levels of economic, social and cultural rights, thereby reducing poverty and inequality.

**Solemn declaration by new members of the Committee**

7. *Mr. Chen, Mr. De Schutter and Mr. Uprimny Yepes made the solemn declaration provided for in rule 13 of the Committee's rules of procedure.*

**Election of the Chairperson and other officers of the Committee**

8. **The Temporary Chairperson**, on behalf of the Committee, expressed appreciation for the work of the outgoing Bureau, and for the excellent leadership of Mr. Kedzia in particular, and invited the Committee to elect a Chairperson, three Vice-Chairpersons and a Rapporteur from among its members, in accordance with rule 14 of its rules of procedure.

9. **Mr. Kedzia**, as outgoing Chairperson, said that the Asian group had not reached a consensus and so was proposing two candidates for the office of Chairperson, Mr. Sadi and Ms. Shin.

10. After a discussion in which **Mr. Abashidze**, **Mr. Kedzia** and **Mr. Schrijver** took part, the **Temporary Chairperson** suggested that the Committee should hold consultations in private.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.35 a.m. and resumed at 11.05 a.m.*

11. *Mr. Sadi was elected Chairperson by secret ballot.*

12. *Mr. Sadi took the Chair.*

13. **The Chairperson** invited nominations for the three offices of Vice-Chairperson.

14. **Mr. Kedzia** nominated Mr. Abashidze.

15. **Ms. Bras Gomes** nominated Mr. Mancisidor.

16. **Mr. Ribeiro Leão** said that he wished to put himself forward as a candidate.

17. *Mr. Abashidze, Mr. Mancisidor and Mr. Ribeiro Leão were elected Vice-Chairpersons by acclamation.*

18. **The Chairperson** invited nominations for the office of Rapporteur.

19. **Mr. Antangana** nominated Mr. Pillay.

20. *Mr. Pillay was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

21. **Ms. Shin** said that it was important for the Committee to work together and that the Chairperson would enjoy her full support during his leadership.

22. **The Chairperson** thanked Ms. Shin for her valuable contribution to the Committee and her work on a general comment on the right to sexual and reproductive health.

**Adoption of the agenda**

23. *The agenda was adopted.*

24. **The Chairperson**, in response to questions raised by Mr. Abashidze, said that his concerns would be addressed in due course and that the Committee would review its work allocation.

**Statements by NGOs**

25. **Ms. Lüst** (FIAN International) said that land distribution in Paraguay was unequal and that 1 per cent of the population owned 77 per cent of the country's arable land. Paraguay was home to tens of thousands of landless, small-scale farmers; some had never owned land, while others had been forcibly evicted from their land or had sold their plots due to poverty. Others had been forced to leave their plots due to the adverse effects of pesticides used in nearby soya plantations. The significant expansion of soya cultivation in Paraguay in recent decades was often associated with land conflicts, human rights abuses and expulsions, and had led small-scale farmers to migrate to cities and slums. Soya had become Paraguay's primary export, and demand for it continued to rise in Europe, where most people were unaware of its impact on rural populations and the environment.

26. FIAN International urged the Government of Paraguay to, inter alia, prohibit the use of pesticides, introduce agrarian reform, override land titles, introduce small-scale organic farming, provide health care to those in need, prohibit the cultivation of genetically modified soya on public land, tax soya exports and assess the potential effects of new soya seeds prior to admitting them.

27. **Mr. Ribeiro Leão** asked whether Ms. Lüst could provide the Committee with specific examples of small-scale farmers who had been adversely affected by genetically modified soya cultivation.

28. **Ms. Lüst** said that FIAN International worked with a Paraguayan farmer named Gerónimo Arévalo who had starred in a documentary called "Raising resistance". All the land in Mr. Arévalo's community had been purchased by Brazilian corporations, which used it to cultivate soya. The herbicides used by the corporations decimated the crops of local small-scale farmers and exposed their families to toxic chemicals. As a result, many of the farmers had been forced to leave the community and had ended up living in slums in the cities.

29. **The Chairperson** asked Ms. Lüst whether she considered that the unequal distribution of land was the root cause of poverty in Paraguay. Were there other key factors, such as corruption, or was the land issue the crux of the problem?

30. **Ms. Lüst** said that the land issue was the main problem and that Paraguayan farmers needed land titles. A better distribution of land among local small-scale farmers was essential to combating poverty and should be a priority.

*The discussion covered in the summary record ended at noon.*